

NIGERIAN PARTIES AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Political parties are different from other forms of associations because of its singular aim which is 'political'. Other associations may profess interests such as economic, educational, political, cultural, religious, social and environmental to mention but just a few. The political aim of parties is often demonstrated by their intrinsic desire to capture the reins of political power. However, before this can come to fruition, they are supposed to adopt a number of strategies principal among which is, 'political education'. This is the strategy by which political parties communicate with citizens regarding their manifestoes and the duties of the citizenry in the electoral process. The foregoing shows that the success of a political party during any electoral process is conditioned by its effective performance of political education. The main objective of this study is to assess the extent to which Nigerian parties have been performing the role of political education on one hand; and advance strategies on how Nigeria's Fourth Republican Parties can better perform their role of political education. The findings of the study reveal among others that (i) Nigerian parties that operated in the First, Second and Third Republics did not fare well in the area of political education (ii) in the current Fourth Republic although most of them availed themselves of the advantage of modern electronic media to reach out to the people, the performance is still below expectation; (iii) that the level of participation of people in political activities depends largely on how political parties and their candidates utilise the advantage of political education. The study recommends that: (i) for a party to actualise its political aim, it must be more 'aggressive' in the area of political education; (ii) parties should take the advantage of modern telecommunication gadgets/networks to reach out to electorate during electioneering campaigns; (iii) civic education which is now being taught in post-primary schools in the country as a compulsory course, should be extended to tertiary institutions; and (iv) there should be constitutional, provisions and electoral laws that will make it mandatory for political parties and their candidates to offer political education to electorate and their supporters.

Keywords: Political Party; Political education; Electorate; Election and Electioneering Campaign

Introduction

Political party is an important institution in any democratic setting. Its imperativeness is explained by the fact that it provides a platform through which public office holders get elected. Although, political theorists are divided over its desirability, majority of them agree that it is desirable in any political system. Two schools of thought have emerged from this debate. One school of thought believes and argues that judging by the functions performed by political parties they are desirable institution and therefore relevant to political discourse (Emerson, 1966:669). Scholars who dominate this school of thought are mainly from liberal democratic political systems. On the other hand; there exists another school of thought which considers parties as being undesirable in a political system. The group argues that political parties usually create divisions that are not so irreconcilable and therefore render the government inoperative. And in view of the fact that political system had been existing and functioning well before the introduction of modern parties, the group argues that political parties “are not an essential feature of political system” (Lapalombara and Weiner, 1966:22). The main proponent of this school of thought is Schumpeter 1976:283) who argues that parties are not desirable because they only promotes ‘private interest’. Societies under military rule also share this view.

Not minding the good and bad aspects of the debate for each school of thought, this study aligns itself with the school of thought that argue that political parties are desirable in political systems in view of the various functions they perform, for instance, the function of stabilising the entity by way of injecting sanity into politics and governance.

One of the important functions performed by political parties in any polity is that of ‘political education’. Before any political party can be successful in its desire to win election and form government, it must have the majority of supports from the electorate. This can only be actualised through the process of political education which can be explained as the practice whereby political parties socialise the public on its programmes and their civic duties.

This study is divided into a number of sections, namely; introduction, conceptual clarifications, parties and political education in Nigeria, strategies for enhancing political education in party activities and conclusion.

Political Party Conceptualised

Political party as a concept has attracted several definitions. This is typical of any concept in political science in particular and social sciences in general. Few of such attempts at explaining political party will be explained in this work.

According to Greenstein and Polsby (1975) cited in Nwabuzor and Mueller (1985:149) political parties are: “All the otherwise varied groups that provide labels under which candidates seek election to governmental office”. The author went further to argue that unlike interest groups that seek indirect political power, political parties seek direct power. Interest groups seek indirect power by lobbying policy makers who are partly the government functionaries of the ruling party. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) also differentiates a political party from other forms of association. Its Section 221 provides that:

No association, other than a political party shall canvas for votes for any candidate at any election or contribute to the funds of any political party or to the election expenses of any candidate at an election.

In his own view, Schelsinger (cited in Ujo, 2000:11) defined a political party as “an organisation whose goal is to capture public office in electoral competition”. This definition is limited to the main aim of a political party- to capture political power – and places it in a premium position among associations when it comes to issues relating to governance. In a similar vein but in a more detailed conceptualisation, Chaturvedi (2006:239) posits that:

A political party is a more or less organised group of citizens who act together as a political unit. They share or profess to share the same opinions on public questions and by exercising their voting power towards a common end, to obtain control of the government. It is an association organised in support of some principle or policy which by constitutional means endeavours to make the determinant of government.

The above definition, as earlier stated, appears more detailed than other positions previously reviewed in this work. For instance, while Greenstein and Polsby (1975) (cited in Nwabuzor and Mueller, 1985) on one hand and Schelsinger (cited in Ujo, 2000) on the other hand, limited their conceptualisation of political party to its aim to capture political power. Chaturvedi's definition covers its main aim and purpose of its formation- common interest. This study aligns itself with Chaturvedi's stated purpose because it is the common interest which the members of a political party shares that differentiates them from the membership of another political party. For example, 'party A' that professes capitalism is markedly different from 'party B' which advocates socialism.

The foregoing shows that definitions of political party are endless and as Ujo (2000:11) argues, "it is difficult if not impossible to have a common definition of a political party". He however, suggests the way out which according to him, is seen in the features of a political party as contained in the various definitions offered by scholars. Without prejudice to his position, this study will like to add that the common position of scholars who have attempted the conceptualisation of political party is better seen in its major functions, identified by them. But this study is of the view that the way they are presented by them is a function of their interests. Although the language may be different, the message remains the same. The positions of two scholars will be compared here. They are: Simbine (2002) and Chaturvedi (2006).

Simbine (2002:11-13) identifies the major functions of a political party as including the following:

- (i) Breeding consensus – it is basically people in agreement who come together to form a political party, therefore, a party has the responsibility of sourcing for members who share the same principle;
- (ii) Recruiting candidates for public offices;
- (iii) educating the public on national issues;
- (iv) operating the government;
- (v) dispensing patronage in order to reward party loyalty; and
- (vi) loyal opposition- the party out of power in the legislative or executive branch assumes the role of watch-dog over government.

Chaturvedi (2006:240) in his own view gives the following as the major functions of a political party:

- (a) The selection of official personnel;
- (b) The formulation of public policies;
- (c) The conduct and criticisms of government;
- (d) Political education of the masses;
- (e) Intermediation between the government and the people;
- (f) It makes the working of the parliamentary government possible
- (g) It ensures smooth working of the government; and
- (h) It brings like-minded people together

The functions of political parties as advanced by Simbine (2002) and Chaturvedi (2006) are not totally different. Perhaps the bone of contention in Chaturvedi's position is seen in the function 'f' where he asserts that a political party "makes the working of the parliamentary government possible". The view of this study, on this, is that he must have been influenced by his environment- Great Britain- before relating the function to parliamentary system of government which is in practice in Great Britain and a place like India. Our take on this is that party activities also make the working of presidential system of government and any other liberal democracy possible. But of interest to us in this study is the function of 'political education' which is the thrust of this work. Both scholars, Simbine (2002) and Chaturvedi (2006) identify political education as one of the important functions of a political party. In fact there is hardly any modern definition of political party that does not touch on this issue of political education. This brings us to the explanation of the concept of 'political education'.

Political Education explained

As posited earlier in this study, political education is one of the major functions performed by a political party. For instance it is identified by Simbine (2012), Chaturvedi (2006), Mato (2010), Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2005); and Lapalombara and Anderson (2001) as a major function of a political party. In fact, there is hardly any modern political theorist who is discussing the role of political party in a 'liberal democracy'- a form of government in which there is a high regard for democratic tenets- that will not delve into the function of political education.

Historically speaking, political education as a concept is a byproduct of the interdisciplinary synthesis between political science and the field of education. This explains why it is commonly used in both fields of study. Sociology also talks about 'political socialisation' which is a related term.

Consequently, it can be posited that what informs the usage of the word is the background and the interest of a scholar. For instance, in the field of education; scholars often perceive the concept within the framework of the activities of a government ‘harnessed to the tasks of nation-building’ (Prewitt, 1971:27). It includes specific programmes of directed political socialisation dominating the school curricula aimed at mobilising the youths to the tasks of creating a new nation. Hence, Prewitt argues that:

Programmes of political education are expected to be explicitly aimed at instilling in the youth of the new nation those values appropriate for national citizens (Prewitt, 1971:2).

From political perspective, Mato (2010:146-147) argues that political education is one of the central functions of a political party. He there after explains it as a process through which a political party enlightens its members “on the weaknesses of, or strength” of a programme, or otherwise”. He explains further that it, serves as a vehicle of “seeking and winning power”. This is where its twin concept, ‘election campaign’, comes in. While political education is the end, election campaign, is the means. During electioneering period, political education usually takes the form of ‘voter education’. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2005:viii) explains Voter education as a programme that “focuses primarily on the electoral rights and responsibilities of all citizens of voting age”. The Council goes further to posit that, “in addition, it should clearly present the nationally accepted electoral procedures and the arrangements put in place for the operations of these procedures”. It added that a voter education programme would include relevant elements of representative democracy, which would enhance the understanding of the presidential system of governance currently practice in Nigeria.

What can be inferred from the position of NERDC (2005) are in two fold. One, voter education is a subset of political education. Two, as a sub-set of political education, it focuses on the electoral aspect, where by, the citizens of a State who are of voting age are educated on the ‘imperativeness of their rights and civic responsibilities during any electoral dispensation. The agent that can best perform the awakening or re-awakening of the consciousness of electorate in this regard is political party. Candidates contesting elections, the Election Management Body (EMB) (otherwise called Electoral Commission), agencies of government like NERDC and National Orientation Agency (NOA) (a mass mobilisation agency in Nigeria) and even the state or Federal Ministry of Education also have a role to play in voter education.

Post-independence African States faced a number of challenges, this explained why most of them resorted to the strategy of political education to mobilise their citizenry. What mainly informed their action was the belief that schools generally serve as an instrument of modernisation. Through formal education, the leaders of tomorrow in a country would have become united in their school days and transform such friendship to political association /friendship in future. Notable among such states were Ghana under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Egypt under Abdul Nasser, Guinea under Sekou Tourer and Tanzania under Julius Nyerere. These leaders inherited highly battered States from colonial governments and therefore resorted to the use of education as a weapon to advance development.

Countries that are characterised by diverse cultural values have been known to have resorted to the use of political education to re-awaken the consciousness of their citizens towards nationhood. For instance, the Nigerian Government has enshrined the teaching of ‘civic education’ – a course on how students will know about their duties to the State on one hand, and the obligations of the Government of a State to its citizenry on the other hand- in the country’s education curricula from primary school up to Senior Secondary School level. This strategy can be described as “operation catch them young”, designed to ‘brain-wash’ Nigerian youths about their responsibilities to the State when they become adults.

Apart from the school setting, Nigerian Government had also created a government agency to sensitise its citizenry towards nationhood. This is apart from the Ministry of Information which serves as the medium of communication between the government and its subjects. Mass Mobilisation for social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) (now known as National Orientation Agency- NOA) was established by the administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida in 1987 to educate Nigerians on the political and economic reforms introduced by it. These were principally the adoption of ‘two-party system’ in the aborted Third Republic and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) – an economic policy which placed greater emphasis on export- substituting economy – in 1987. MAMSER was also used as the platform to unite the people of the country at the wake of the crises that greeted the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, a Southerner.

With regard to Political Science, as a political term, political education has attracted different conceptualizations from political theorists of different ages. Their views are however, not totally contradictory to that of educationists, their areas of divergence being that it is usually discussed more in

relation to party activities and electoral processes in political science. Like its conception in education, political education is also seen as a mobilisation instrument in political studies. It is perceived as a weapon of political integration – attempt to unite the various political groups in a State- and political analysts always discuss and examine the activities of political actors in relation to it is to control political power. However, more relevant to the discourse on political education is its relationship with party activities. The intrinsic desire of any serious-minded political party is to control the reins of power. However, this desire can only come to fruition after it might have won a general election. But one of the conditions for winning election by a political party is its ability to mobilise a large number of electorate through the mechanism of political education. Political education therefore remains a crucial role of any well organised and articulated political party. The foregoing brings us to the question of what political education connotes in relation to party activities.

According to Simbine (2002:11-12) political education can be explained as the means through which political parties bring important issues to public attention. The scholar goes further to say that each political party “publishes its position on the issues of the day, which is presented by party officials and candidates in pamphlets, press conferences and speeches and television and newspaper advert”. These help citizens to form opinions on controversial topics and give voters a choice between alternative approaches to important issues, the author added. From this explanation, it can be argued that in the absence of political education, the views of party members and supporters of the party will lack cohesion. The implication of this is that when their views on a particular issue of concern are presented in a disarray form, the party stands the risk of losing out.

Agbaje (2006:198) in his own view posits that “through internal debate and discussion, as well as campaigning and electoral competition, parties engage in political education and socialization”. What this portends is that any activities of political parties aimed at giving information and enlightenment to people is tantamount to political education or socialisation. The essence of socialisation is to shape the opinion of an educated person in line with the principle of the educator.

From the foregoing, it can be posited that political education in relation to party-politics can be explained as the activities of a political party aimed at keeping the electorate well informed of its affairs, its positions on crucial national issues, how to perform their civic responsibilities especially voting during elections and to be abreast of its programmes. Political parties have the responsibility to arouse the interests of people in party activities. This is imperative because some of them might have become apathetic towards political and economic issues probably due to the activities of the ruling party or the prevailing socio-economic conditions in a country.

Experiences have revealed that the task of arousing people’s interest in party-politics may be bedeviled by the literacy level of the people of a society as the case in most African States which are predominantly illiterate societies. This notwithstanding, political parties have the responsibility to sensitise their members towards their cause. It is only a matter of strategy. In fact, the more articulate a party is, in giving political education to people, the greater the chance of winning more supporters to its side and the brighter its chance of winning elections.

Election campaign is seen by political theorists (for example, Chaturvedi, 2006; Denver, 2001) as the mechanism for political education. It is through it political parties and candidates alike can perform the task of political education.

Chaturvedi (2006:36) explains election campaign as; “period immediately before election, when candidates canvass for support”. This definition gives a picture of the period of the electoral process that constitutes campaign. This is given as the pre-election period. In his own view, Denver (2001:413) begins his explanation of ‘election campaign’ by positing that “election campaigns are a familiar and integral part of free elections”. He went further to say that it (campaign) is as old as election and it is the period when “candidates and their supporters seek to persuade the electorate to vote for them: (Denver, 2001: 413).

Election campaign from the above perspectives, occupies a strategic position in the electoral process. It contributes significantly to the electoral exploit of a candidate or political party in an election. The implication of this position is that when it is handled with levity by a political party or candidate, the end-result is that they will meet their waterloo on the day of election . On the other hand, when approached with all sense of seriousness by way of giving proper or adequate political education to their supporters, the result will be bountiful electoral exploit. In essence, a candidate or political party that fails to utilise the advantage of election campaign can hardly win a credible poll. In fact, election campaign can be said to be the most primitive and effective means of political education. Through this medium, political parties and candidates for elections, address political rallies or communicate with their supporters via print and electronic mass media. They educate their supporters on their party programmes as contained in their

manifestoes, address issues of national interest and teach them about the imperativeness of their civic duties and how to go about discharging their electoral duty.

There are variations of election campaign and the argument on which of them can be branded as the best strategy is a matter of the sentiment of an analyst and his milieu. For instance, in relation to the latter part of this position, open electioneering campaign will work better in a predominantly illiterate society than campaign via electronic media or print media. Also, relating to this is one of the issues raised by Denver (2001:414) who posits that “campaigning styles and techniques have also changed dramatically over time”. He attributes this to factors such as; “an increase in the size of the electorate due to extensions of suffrage and simple population growth, the rise of mass circulation of newspapers and the introduction of various campaign laws” (Denver, 2001:414). However, apart from these factors, this study is of the view that the upsurge of Information Technology (IT) particularly the use of hand-set and internet facilities has brought about a drastic change in election campaign of the old (For example during colonial days/ First Republic) and present (for instance, Fourth Nigerian Republic).

With the foregoing background, Denver (2001) identified four factors which have had a “marked impact upon election campaigning in more recent years” across the globe. They are; ‘television’, ‘opinion polls’, ‘computerisation’ and ‘campaign finance’. Without prejudice to his position, the first three of these factors will be discussed with slight modifications in reference to how Nigerian parties of the Fourth Republic have been performing the task of political education.

Nigerian Parties and Political Education in the Fourth Republic

Over the years, Nigerian parties have developed some strategies aimed at performing the task of political education. Such efforts; have been known to have been conditioned by a number of factors discussed in this section of the study.

(a)Media

The media is made up of both print and electronic (newspapers, radio and television). According to the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2005:58) the media “provide suitable channels for communication with party candidates and elected representatives”. Through the media, it is possible for political parties, their candidates or voters to engage on discussions on the radio and television or by publishing articles in newspapers.

The media have become very useful to political parties or their candidates in reaching many and far-away audience, especially in literate and large societies. This is unlike face-to-face election campaigns where political parties’ chance of political education is limited.

The oldest mass media in Nigeria and indeed modern democracies is the newspaper. Currently, there are scores of newspapers in the country. Some of them are owned by governments while others are privately owned. Early political parties in the country that operated used the platform to give political education to their members, supporters and the generality of the people. In fact, most of the major political parties (Northern Peoples Congress – NPC, Action Group- AG and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons, later known as National Council of Nigerian Citizens- NCNC) had their own newspapers. For instance, the official newspaper of the NCNC was the ‘West African Pilot’ while that of AG was the ‘Nigerian Tribune’.

Through newspapers, political parties or their candidates can publish articles in newspapers bordering on sensitising their members and supporters on their civic responsibilities when it comes to electoral process. Party’s programmes or manifestoes can also be published in newspapers while advertorials on voting procedures can also be placed in the pages of newspapers. Furthermore, according to NERDC (2005:58) political parties and their candidates “can write public opinion columns and also try to shape editorial opinion”.

Its advantages notwithstanding, the main challenge of newspapers as a channel for political education is seen in the fact that quite a good percentage of the population of a State might be cut off, reason being that, if it is populated mainly by the illiterates.

Radio is another major component of mass media. It is an electronic device whereby people can hear the voice of a presenter or the person anchoring a programme. Radio has been a channel for political education in Nigeria beginning from colonial days till now. Through the platform, political parties or their candidates can reach their members and supporters very fast. As a platform of political education through radio stations, political parties and their candidates alike, can offer political education to their members and supporters. Special radio jingles on why people should participate in political activities are also usually aired by radio stations free of charge or sponsored by political parties. This will cover aspects relating to the civic responsibilities of the citizenry and up-date on the political activities in the country.

Its merits notwithstanding radio has the disadvantage of not having a face-to-face interaction with the presenters of a programme. Furthermore, apart from the management team of a radio station, its records can hardly be preserved by the listeners.

Radio remains a veritable tool of political education in Nigeria with the advantage of anchoring its programmes in not only in English language but also, local languages.

Television is another major type of mass media. It is an electronic device. According to Denver (2001:415) the growth of television has revolutionised election campaign. Through it, a wider audience can be reached at minimal cost at least when campaigning. Where its services are available, people enjoy watching its programmes. This is because unlike print media and radio, its views enjoy the dual advantage of hearing the voice of a speaker and seeing him face-to-face. However, there is the disadvantage of not being in position of asking questions on issues raised by a presenter (Campaigner).

In the case of Nigeria, the First Television station was established in Ibadan, old Western Region, in 1959. But apart from the Action Group (the party in government in Western Region then) and its candidates, other political parties did not avail themselves of its (television) advantage in electioneering campaigns principally due to the nature of party-politics in the country then. This was intolerance to opposition. In the Second Republic when all the then nineteen states of the federation had transmission stations of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) political parties and candidates vying for elective offices did not use television maximally to reach their supporters on their own except for the coverage made by the media house itself. NTA only gave fair coverage to the campaign activities of the five political parties. What contributed to this was that there were no private television stations in the country then. This explains why the electioneering campaigns that preceded the 1979 general elections were dominated by open rallies and newspapers advertorials – thus limiting the degree of success derivable in political education. The situation did not change much in the campaign events that preceded the 1983 elections. However, the National Party of Nigeria which was the ruling party then, enjoyed tremendous advantage in terms of coverage over other political parties. But with the establishment of the Lagos Television before the election, the Unity Party of Nigeria also enjoyed the advantage of coverage in Lagos metropolis.

The experiences of political parties in the use of television as a medium of political education witnessed a boom in the aborted Third Republic of Nigeria. What was responsible for this was that the country then had a sitting Military Government. Added to this was the fact that the two registered political parties (National Republican Convention – NRC and Social Democratic Party- SDP were created by the Military Government in 1989. Consequently, they were Government institutions thus explaining why they received equitable treatment from the Government –owned Television Stations.

With regard to the Fourth Republic which began in 1999, how political parties and their candidates utilised the advantage of television, serving as a channel of political education witnessed a dramatic change. What was responsible for this was that before the take-off of electioneering campaign activities in 1998 some State Governments had, had their State-owned television stations. Apart from this, elections of 1999 were held under a Military Government. Therefore, for 1998/1999 campaign activities, political parties and candidates for elections enjoyed fair treatment. But beginning from 2002/2003 the role of mass media electioneering campaigns were guided by electoral laws and code of conduct attested to by parties although political parties and contestants into elective offices enjoyed the advantage of television in actualizing political education, the fact remained that it was highly politicized at both the state and federal levels. At the state level, premium attention was given to the ruling parties by the state-owned television stations. This generated allegations and counter-allegations by election stakeholders. While non-governing political parties accused state-owned Television Stations of bias in the coverage of their campaign activities, the ruling parties used to lay claim to the fact that they were fair to all (Oyelami, 2007:23).

It was in view of the foregoing that 'Political Parties Code of Conduct 2013' of Nigeria addresses the issue of political parties having equal access to the State-owned media. Section 3(13) of the Code provides that; "all political parties shall have equal /equitable access to public owned print and electronic media, as guaranteed by law". The good side of this agreement made at the instance of the country's Inter-Party Advisory Council' (IPAC) notwithstanding political executives of States who have state media under their control were not party to the decision, but leaders of their party. This explains why political parties not controlling a state apparatus, are still being discriminated against by state officials in using state owned media as a platform for actualising political education.

As at the time the 2015 general elections were held in March that year, all States had their own television stations. Experience, however, revealed that to gain access to them maximally, a political party must be the ruling party at the State level. This is not to say that non-ruling parties did not enjoy their patronage but undue advantage was enjoyed by any ruling party.

Also, serving as a boost in the Fourth Republic was the upsurge of private television stations which were licensed enmass between 2001 and 2007 by the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. But what bastardised their advantage over public-owned television stations were their expensive charges and the open support of some of them for certain political parties and candidates alike. For instance, both African Independent Television (AIT) station and Channel Television station were visibly identified with the two major political parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC). The AIT is owned by Raymond Dokpesi a card-carrying member of PDP while Channels Television Station is owned by John Momoh, though not a card-carrying member of APC, an avowed supporter of it. Consequently, the political programmes aired by both stations used to tilt towards the political party of their interest. Therefore, it was not the quality of the political programmes of a particular television station, that determines its patronage by political parties and candidates contesting for elective positions but its partisanship.

At this juncture, it can be argued that the role of television in serving as a medium of political education was dysfunctional in nature bearing in mind also, the allegation of some political parties and candidates that they were denied patronage by State-owned television stations. Even the Federal –owned television station, NTA, was not spared of the criticisms of favouritism as it was alleged that it used to give wider coverage to the ruling party, PDP, than non-ruling parties. For instance, while reporting on the media coverage received by the Presidential candidate of the PDP (Chief Olusegun Obasanjo) and that of All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) (General Muhammad Buhari) during the 2003 Presidential election, Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) (2003:87) reported that:

There was a huge imbalance between the coverage received by the PDP /President Obasanjo and the other political parties and candidates both in terms of the amount of the coverage and quality of coverage with the result that: the PDP/ President Obasanjo and the ANPP/General Buhari appeared to have received more coverage than all the other parties and candidates put together.

The above scenario also played out in 2015 General Elections. Each state Chief executive that contested election or had his political party contesting elections, enjoyed the maximum supports of the state-owned media. For instance, the opposition party in Kwara State (Nigeria) at that time, PDP, had to rely on the use of Federal Radio, Idofian (a town of about 18 kilometers from Ilorin) for campaign activities because it did not have free access to the State-owned radio station (Radio Kwara, Ilorin).

Opinion Polls

McLean and McMillan (2009:383) define opinion polls as “surveys designed to discover the attitudes and / or intended or recalled behaviours of political actors; these may be leaders, legislators, bureaucrats, or electors”. According to the scholars, “such polls may be conducted by a variety of means, including telephoning, face-to-face interviewing, and web questionnaires”. Each of these methods has its merits and demerits but what is common with opinion polls is that a limited number of people will be involved. More often than not, in developed democracies, it is usually conducted midway of the term of an administration as a way of testing its popularity and the chances it has in winning a future election. The foregoing explains why Denver (2001:419) posits that; “Public polls usually concentrate on reporting the current voting intentions of the electorate although they also often detail voters’ opinions on campaign issues, assessments of party leaders or candidates, and so on”.

Public poll in climes where it is used, usually have potential impact upon voters. As a mechanism for political education, it may send either a positive or wrong signal to a voter as regards the chances of a political party or its candidate in winning a future election. It is because of its disadvantage that it is now fast becoming an unpopular mechanism for political education in some European countries such as France, Spain and Germany. According to Denver (2001) such countries have imposed restrictions on the publication of polls during campaigns. It is further argued that it infringes on the right of voter and their freedom of how to vote during elections.

Public opinion poll is an unpopular mechanism for political education in developing States of which Nigeria belongs. However, this is not to say that such opinions are not being expressed in the country. But it thrives better in literate societies than illiterate climes.

Public Opinion Polls in Nigeria during electioneering periods are usually expressed in the forms of Newspapers captions or articles, political debates on television and /or in radio involving the political actors of various political parties and the use of internet facilities like face-book, u-tube, whattshap etc, to reach prospective voters and members of the public. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was the foremost

Presidential candidate during the 2011 Presidential Election in Nigeria to shape the opinion of people in his support. The advantage of predicting the outcome of an election and on the basis of that wins more supporters notwithstanding, it has the disadvantage of involving a limited number of people. In fact, in a place like Nigeria, public opinion polls are alien to many people.

Computerisation /Internet Facilities

Through computers and internet facilities, the entire world has been turned to a global village. The happenings in the remotest part of the world can be brought to the knowledge of the entire globe within few seconds. Again, they have the advantage of parsimony. Their services are also relatively cheaper when compared to the charges of Newspapers, televisions and radios. But more importantly, by browsing a voter will have the advantage of subjecting the programmes and activities of different political parties to scrutiny and on the basis of that becomes more politically educated about them. A political party or its candidates can also use the platform to have a face-to-face encounter with voters and exchange views on line. For instance they may “deny or confirm allegations against or attributed to them” (NERDC, 2005:58). The foregoing shows that another advantage of internet facilities to an ordinary prospective electorate is that it affords him or her the opportunity of shaping his voting decision secretly and privately without much influence from external factors.

Computerisation /Internet Facilities further affords political parties in Nigeria the opportunity of conducting members registration on line and of making public announcements detailing their member and supporters alike, about the happenings in other political parties in the country.

Its advantages earlier enumerated in this study notwithstanding, computer/internet facilities is prone to the abuse of hackers as experienced by the United States of America during its 2016 Presidential election. Hackers can use the platform to miseducate the supporters of an opposition party or its candidate. This can cause an irreparable damage to the chance of a political party or candidate during election. Political parties resorted to this strategy during the 2015 General Elections more than previous elections in the country. However, it needs to be stated that party activities in the first three Republics of the country did not experience the advantage and disadvantages of computer /internet facilities.

Conclusion

This study has examined how Nigerian Political Parties have been performing the task of political education in the Fourth Republic. The yardstick used in analysing this were the four-factors identified by Denver (2001) which according to him, have had a “marked impact upon election campaigning in more recent years. The four factors were discussed by drawing inferences from Nigeria with particular emphasis on the Fourth Republic. The following are the major findings of the study.

1. Nigerian parties that operated in the First, Second and Third Republics did not fare well in the area of political education. What was mainly responsible for this was that the mechanism for political education principally available to them was the Mass media (Newspapers, Radio and Television).
2. In the current Fourth Republic, although most of them have been availing themselves of the advantage of modern electronic media to reach out to people; the performance is still below expectation.
3. That the level of participation of people in political activities depends largely on how political parties and their candidates utilise the advantage of political education. For instance, voter turnout in elections in the Fourth Republic continues to be low. The expectation is that if electorate are well informed, they should know that voting is a civic responsibility. For example, the voter turnout during the 2015 Presidential Election was less than fifty per cent. (INEC, 2015)
4. State political executives always politicise political education through State Controlled Mass Media. Following from the above findings, the study recommends that:
 - (i) For a political party to actualise its political aim, it must be more ‘aggressive’ in the area of political education
 - (ii) Political parties should depend more on computer and internet facilities than any other mechanism for political education because of their advantages
 - (iii) To increase the level of political participation / political awareness in Nigeria, relevant provisions on political education should be enshrined in the country’s constitution and electoral laws. This will make it a formal task to be performed by political parties. If done, this will be similar to Section 2 (a) of the Electoral Act 2010 (As amended) which makes political education a must –performed task by the country’s Election Management Body.

- (iv) Civic education which is now being taught in post-primary schools in the country as a compulsory subject should be extended to tertiary institutions. Similarly, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) which has the responsibility of (re)awakening the consciousness of the people of the country to their responsibilities should focus more on political education. This will in turn increase voter-turnout in elections.
- (v) Political players should be allowed to have unrestricted access to State- controlled media in line with what is contained in the Political Parties Code of Conduct 2013. However, to make this policy to be more effective both the constitution and the Electoral Act of the country should be strengthened.

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